

NARRATIVE.

[By the request of many of my friends, I re-publish the following Narrative of my "*Nashville experience.*"]

On the first day of July I left Cincinnati for the purpose of selling the "Cottage Bible," in order, from the profits of the sale to raise funds sufficient to enable me to complete my education. The largest portion of my books was sent to Nashville by water.

I took several copies of the Bible with me, besides a considerable number of the little work entitled "Six Months in a Convent." In packing them into my baggage, a number of pamphlets and pa-

pers of different descriptions were used to prevent the books from injury by rubbing, intending to distribute them as suitable opportunities should present. Among them were old religious newspapers, anti-slavery publications, numbers of the Missionary Herald, Sunday School periodicals, Temperance Almanacs, &c. At Danville, Ky., where a State Anti-Slavery Society had been organized some months before, and where the subject of emancipation seemed to be discussed without restraint, besides selling several copies of my books, I parted with a large share of my anti-slavery publications. In traveling through the state, I distributed most of my temperance almanacs and other papers above mentioned, including a few tracts on slavery, given to those who were willing to receive them. *I gave none of these to any person of color, bond or free, nor had I any intention of doing so.*

Near Gallatin, in Sumner county, Tennessee, I sold a copy of Rankin's Letters

on Slavery. I arrived at Nashville, on Saturday, the 18th of July, and took lodgings at the Nashville Inn. The young man who accompanied me, in bringing into the house my books from the box of the barouche, omitted the anti-slavery tracts and other pamphlets. Their being overlooked did not occupy the attention of either of us, and on Monday morning the barouche was taken to the shop of Mr. Stout to be repaired. In the course of the day, Mr. S. remarked to his workmen, as he afterwards informed me, that perhaps as I came from Cincinnati, I was an abolitionist. On this, one of them commenced rummaging my carriage. In the box he found, among the other pamphlets, a February No. of the Anti-Slavery Record, with a cut representing a drove of slaves chained, the two foremost having violins on which they were playing—the American flag waving in the centre, whilst the slave driver, with his whip, was unging on the rear. This

added considerably to the general excitement, which I afterwards learned, was prevailing in relation to slavery, and in a short time it was noised about, that I had been "circulating incendiary periodicals among the free colored people, and trying to excite the slaves to insurrection." So soon as the report came to my knowledge, I went to Mr. Stout and explained to him how it was that the pamphlets had been left in the barouche: I then took into my custody the remainder of them and locked them up in my trunk. Mr. S. on this occasion, told me the scene represented in the cut, was one of frequent occurrence—that it was accurate in all its parts, and that he had witnessed it again and again. Mr. S. is himself a slaveholder, though as he says, opposed to slavery in principle—a *member* if not an *elder* in the Presbyterian church, and one of the committee of vigilance which afterwards sat in judgment upon me. The excitement continued to increase,

and it was soon added to the report, that I had been posting up handbills about the city, inviting an insurrection of the slaves. Knowing all the charges to be false, feeling unconscious of any evil intention, and therefore fearless of danger, I continued the sale of my Bibles, in and around the city, till Saturday, the 18th of the month, when as I was preparing to leave town to attend a camp-meeting, held some eight or ten miles distant, a Mr. Estell, formerly an auctioneer and vender of slaves at public outcry, in Alabama, met me at the door, and demanded "*those abolition documents*" I had in my possession. I replied he should have them, and proceeded to get them for him. When he made the demand he was under the influence of very highly excited feelings—his whole frame indicating agitation even to trembling. On presenting the pamphlets, I requested him to read before he condemned them. This seemed greatly to increase his rage.

I then proceeded to the camp ground, where about two hours after my arrival, I was taken in charge by Mr. Braughton, the principal city officer. I take pleasure here in stating of Mr. B., that allowing his conduct to be strictly official, he exhibited to me throughout the whole of this melancholy affair, the kindest and most delicate deportment. I immediately accompanied him to town, where, on arriving at my boarding house, I found the Mayor, Mr. John P. Erwin, waiting for us. He remarked he was afraid I had got myself into difficulty, and wished me to appear before the Committee of Vigilance. To this I replied it would give me pleasure to do so, as I wished it understood just what I had done, and what I had *not* done. He then asked me if I had any witnesses I wished to have called. My reply was, I knew not what need I had of witnesses, till I heard the charge brought against me—that I supposed it would be necessary to prove me guilty of

some misdemeanor, and not that it should be upon me to prove that I had broken no law. To his demand, if I was ready for trial, I answered, I wished it to take place immediately, as I was anxious to return to the camp ground.

We repaired to the court room, which was at once crowded full to overflowing. The roll of the Committee, (sixty in number,) was called, and the names of the absentees proclaimed.

The meeting being called to order, the Mayor stated, that he had caused me to be arrested, and brought before the Committee, in consequence of the excitement produced by the periodicals known to have been in my possession; and that he had also taken into his charge my trunk, which he had delayed opening till my return. The trunk was then produced before the Committee, and a motion made and carried, that I should be interrogated as to its contents before opening it. On being interrogated accordingly, I replied,

as the trunk was before them, I preferred they should make the examination for themselves. It was then resolved, (the whole house voting,) that my trunk should be examined. The officer first laid before the Committee a pile of clothing, which was examined very closely: then followed my books, among which was found, one copy of the "Oasis," one of "Rankin's Letters on Slavery," and one of "Bourne's Picture of Slavery in the United States." These, I informed the Committee, I had put in my trunk for my own perusal, as I wished to compare what had been written with the result of my own observation while in the slave states, and that no individual had seen them besides myself. A careful inspection was made of the books also. Then was presented my business and private letters, which were read with eagerness, and much interest. Extracts were read aloud.

Among them was one from a letter received from a very aged and venerable

lady, running thus: "Preached a stream of Abolition, two hundred and fifty miles long," in travelling from Cincinnati to Cleveland. Great importance was attached to this. Another spoke of the inconsistency of celebrating the 4th of July, while so many among us were literally in bondage." Another, from a letter of Mr. Ensign, (a gentleman well known to entertain no very favorable sentiments for Abolitionism,) which, after urging me to diligence in the sale of my Bibles, (obtained from him,) jestingly concluded, "Now don't spend more than half your time among the niggers." This was cheered by the crowd. The last was from the letter of a friend of mine, a minister of the gospel, who remarked that on visiting his friends at the East, Abolition had been the principal topic of conversation that day, and he had preached on Slavery a night!

Great stress was laid on these extracts, and I was questioned very minutely as to

the authors of the letters. They labored much to prove I was sent out by some society, and that I was under the guise of a religious mission, performing the odious office of an insurrectionary agent.

My journal was next brought in review, but as it had been kept partly in short hand and in pencil mark, the memoranda short and hastily written, it served them very little purpose. It was laid down again by the Mayor who had attempted to read it aloud, with this remark, "It can not be read, but it is evidently very hostile to slavery."

A witness now was called forward by whom it was proved, that an Anti-Slavery periodical of some kind had been left by some individual on the counter of the Nashville Inn. That it was left with a copy of the Cottage Bible, at the time I arrived. On being questioned by me, it turned out to be a number of the Emancipator, used as an envelop or wrapper to the Bible. Other witnesses were called,

but this is the substance of all they proved against me.

It was conceded without hesitation on my part, that I had sold a copy of "Rankin's Letters," in Sumner county, and that I had read to Mr. Cayce, at his request, the number of the "A. S. Record" before mentioned, which he said contained nothing that any candid man, and especially any *Christian* could gainsay. The Chairman of the Committee asked me if I remembered the *places* where I had circulated Anti-Slavery tracts: thus by the form of the question, as well as by his manner, making the impression that I *had* circulated them *some where*, and that the fact of my having done so was known to the Committee. To this I replied that what I did, I did openly,—that I had not distributed any Anti-Slavery publications whatever in Tennessee, except the one above mentioned, and that, if any had been found under circumstances calculated to throw suspicion on me, it was a device

of my enemies: On being interrogated as to my former connection with Lane Seminary, I informed the Committee that I had been a member of that Institution as well as of the A. S. Society, formed there more than a year before; and that I had voluntarily withdrawn, and had received an honorable dismissal from the same.

A handbill was next produced, and I was asked if I had ever seen it. After having examined it, I replied I never had. I was then asked with a stronger emphasis, if I was sure I had never seen a copy of it. I again replied, *I was sure I never had.* I was asked a third time, with a provoking and still stronger emphasis, if I was *positively* sure I had never seen any thing of the kind. I again took it into my hand, and after examining it more minutely, again replied *I was positively sure I had never seen any thing of the kind.* The trial continued from between 4 and 5 o'clock, P. M., till 10 o'clock, when I was called upon for my defense.

The perplexity I must have felt in making it may well be imagined, when it is recollected that I was charged not with transgressing any law of the state, or ordinance of the city,—but with conduct, to which, if the law had attached the penalty of crime, its forms were totally disregarded, and this too, before an array of persons banded together in contravention of law, and from whose mandate of execution there was no appeal. However I took the opportunity thus offered to declare my sentiments fully on the subject of slavery. Whilst I told them I believed slaveholding to be inconsistent with the gospel, and a constant transgression of God's law, I yet said that, in bringing about emancipation, the interests of the master were to be consulted as well as those of the slave. And that the whole scheme of emancipation contemplated this result, that the slave should be put in possession of rights which we have declared to be inalienable from him as a

man ;—that he should be considered as an immortal fellow being, entrusted by his master with the custody of his own happiness, and accountable to him for the exercise of his powers ;—that he should be treated as our neighbor and brother. In reference to my demeanor towards the slaves, that in the few instances in which I had casually conversed with them, I had recommended quietness, patience, submission ; teaching them to “ render good for evil,” and discountenancing every scheme of emancipation, which did not, during its process, look for its success in the good conduct of the slaves whilst they remain such, and to the influence of argument and persuasion addressed to the understandings and consciences of slaveholders, exhorting them to obey God in doing justice and showing mercy to their fellow men.

After my remarks were ended, the crowd were requested to withdraw whilst the Committee deliberated on the case.

In company with a friend or two I was directed to a private room, near at hand to await their decision. Up to this period during the whole proceedings my mind was composed, my spirits calm and unruffled; nor did I entertain the most distant apprehension there would be so flagrant a violation of my rights as an American citizen, and so deliberate an attempt to dishonor me as a man.

In this confidence I was strengthened by the consideration of all the circumstances of the case. What I had done, I had done openly. *There was no law forbidding what I had done.* I had contracted no guilt that the law considered such; my intentions had been those of kindness to all—I had no secret feelings of guilt, arraigning me before the bar of my conscience, for any mean or clandestine movement. In addition to this, too, among my triers, there was a great portion of the respectability of Nashville. Nearly half of the whole number, profes-

sors of Christianity, the reputed stay of the church, supporters of the cause of benevolence in the form of Tracts and Missionary Societies and Sabbath Schools, several members and most of the elders of the Presbyterian church, from whose hands but a few days before, I had received the emblems of the broken body and shed blood of our blessed Savior.

My expectations, however, were soon shaken by Mr. Braughton's saying, on entering the room where I was, that he feared it would go hard with me,—that, whilst some of the committee were in favor of thirty-nine, others were for inflicting one hundred and two hundred lashes, whilst others still thought me worthy of death.

I repeat, till this moment my mind had been kept unruffled. But when it was announced that my life was demanded, for an instant my whole frame was agitated, but when “I considered all the oppressions that were done under the sun.

and beheld the tears of the oppressed, and saw they had no comforter, and on the side of their oppressor there was power, but they had no comforter," and especially when I remembered that my blessed Jesus had laid down his life for me, it seemed a privilege, if demanded, to lay down my life for the brethren. Committing my cause to Him who judgeth righteously, I again had "perfect peace," and with patience and composure waited for the issue.

My suspense was at length terminated on being summoned to hear the decision: it was prefaced by a few remarks of this kind by the Chairman, that they "had acted with great caution and deliberation, and however unsatisfactory their conclusion might be to me, they had acted conscientiously with a full recognition of their duty to their God;"—that they had found me guilty—1st, "of being a member of an Anti-slavery Society in Ohio:" 2d, of "having in my possession periodicals pub-

lished by the American Anti-slavery Society;" and 3d, "they believed I had circulated these periodicals, and advocated in the community, the principles they inculcated." He then pronounced that I was condemned to receive twenty lashes on my bare back, and ordered to leave the place in 24 hours. [This was not an hour previous to the commencement of the Sabbath.]

The doors were thrown open, and the crowd admitted. To them it was again remarked, that "the committee had been actuated by conscientious motives; and to those who thought the punishment *too severe*, they would only say, that they had done what they, after *mature deliberation*, thought to be right; and to those who thought it *too light*, they must say, that in coming to their decision the committee had regarded not so much the number of stripes, as the disgrace and infamy of being publicly whipped." The sentence being again repeated, it was received

with great applause, accompanied by stamping of feet and clapping of hands.

The chairman then called for the sentiments of the spectators in reference to their approbation of the decision of the committee, desiring all who were satisfied with it, and would pledge themselves that I should receive no injury after the execution of the sentence, to signify it in the usual way. There was no dissenting voice.

The chairman then expressed in terms bordering on the extravagant, his high gratification of the sense of propriety that had been manifested in the conduct of the meetings, and that so much confidence was placed in the committee. The crowd was now ordered to proceed to the public square and form a ring.

I had been assured that my trunk with all its contents, as they were taken out, should be returned to me. But while the crowd were leaving the house, Mr. Hunt, Editor of the Banner, and as I am in-

formed, an emigrant from New England, where he was born, set him self busily to work to secure in his own hands, my journal, sketch book, business and private letters, &c.

By no one concerned in the whole proceeding was there so much exasperated feeling shown, as by Mr. H. It was now displayed in the pale death like countenance, the agitated frame, the hurried, furious air with which he seized the papers and tied them up in a handkerchief, clinching them in his hands, and at the same time eyeing me with an intense yet vacant gaze, bespeaking not only rage, but a consciousness of doing wrong. Of my papers I have heard nothing since Mr. H. took them into his custody.

[I was told by Mr. ———, of Boston, Mass., who accompanied Mr. Hunt to the Southern states, that on their first sight of slavery, Mr. Hunt was so shocked by the cruelties and barbarities which his eyes saw and his ears heard, that he again

and again repeated that he must return to New England. He could not live and be obliged to witness such shocking abominations.

"Vice is a monster of so hideous mien,
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

I entered the ring that had been formed; the chairman, (accompanied by the committee) again called for an expression of sentiment in relation to the sentence passed upon me; again the vote was unanimous in approbation of it, and again did he express his gratification at the good order by which the whole proceeding had been characterized. While some of the company were engaged in stripping me of my garments, a motion was made and seconded that I be exonerated altogether from the punishment. This brought many and furious imprecations on the mover's head, and created a commotion which was appeased only by the

sound of the instrument of torture and disgrace upon my naked body.

I knelt to receive the punishment, which was inflicted by Mr. Braughton, the city officer, with a heavy cow skin. It was now the same hour of the night in which "Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God," and I felt that "the foundations of the prison walls [of slavery] were shaken." The Sabbath—emblem of that rest that remaineth for the people of God, was just commencing. Nearly one-half of the Committee who condemned me were members of the different churches in Nashville. Two of them were preachers, (one a Methodist, the other a Disciple,) a large number of them were members of the Presbyterian church, with whom I sat at the communion table about three weeks before, seven of them elders of that church from whose hands I received the bread and the cup in remembrance of the sufferings of Christ; and one of those elders now stood and held my

clothes while I was scourged. These circumstances, together with the calm serenity of the midnight hour, and the thought of meeting that immense crowd at the bar of God, gave feelings better imagined than described. To give vent to these feelings I attempted to raise my voice to heaven in prayer. The death-like silence that prevailed for a moment, was suddenly broken with loud exclamations, "G—d d—n him, stop his praying." I was raised to my feet by Mr. Braughton, and conducted by him to my lodging, where it was thought safe for me to remain but for a few moments.

And though most of my *friends* were at the camp ground, I was introduced into a family of entire strangers, from whom I received a warm reception and the most kind and tender treatment. They will ever be remembered with grateful emotions.

On the ensuing morning, owing to the great excitement that was still prevailing,

I found it necessary to leave the place in disguise, with only what clothing I had about my person. Leaving unsold property to the amount of nearly three hundred dollars, and sacrificing at least two hundred on my barouche, horse, &c., which I was obliged to sell. Of my effects at Nashville, I have heard nothing since my return, though I have frequently written to my friends concerning them.

AMOS DRESSER.

Cin., Aug. 25, 1835.